

Goal 3.1: Foster educational programs enabling health sciences librarians already in the workplace to update and extend their professional education and training.

Findings

The pipeline into health sciences librarianship is already full, with the bulk of the librarians already employed in health care institutions and likely to be there for the next fifteen years. These librarians need educational programs to prepare them for the challenges of the coming years.³⁸ The field of health care is information intensive and changing rapidly. Librarians must continue to acquire new skills by which to keep pace themselves and to assure the dissemination of that information to users.

The Medical Library Association has an active continuing education program, with courses given at annual and chapter meetings,³⁹ a journal club,⁴⁰ and self-study programs.⁴¹ Other associations with continuing education activities include the Special Libraries Association (SLA), the American Society for Information Science (ASIS), and the American Medical Informatics Association (AMIA). Additionally, the Council on Library Resources (CLR) provides support for library research, as well as mid-career internships and senior fellowships.⁴²

Traditionally, Schools of Library and Information Science have done very little in the area of continuing education with some notable exceptions, mainly because there is no rewards system for faculty participating in these programs as far as tenure and promotion is concerned.⁴³

Some of the methods that have been tried for continuing education are not as effective as hoped. For example, courses given at annual association meetings do not reach members who can not afford to travel to the meeting, or non-members; internships that require working adults to relocate for a year do not take into account family and other responsibilities that prevent people from taking advantage of these programs.

For example, NLM and the Council on Library Resources sponsored a program in the 1980s to provide training opportunities for leadership roles for mid-career librarians.⁴⁴ It was the experience of this program that there was not a sufficiently large pool of candidates to draw upon, at least in part because working adults were not able to leave home and family responsibilities to participate in it.

Recommendations

- ▼ *Health sciences librarians should continue to take individual responsibility for their own professional development. At the same time, supervisors must support and guide employees in upgrading their skills.*
- ▼ *Schools of library and information science, and other institutions of higher learning, should sponsor programs that contribute to the concept of life-long learning and to the retooling and continuing development of practicing health sciences librarians.*
- ▼ *The MLA and other professional associations should strengthen their continuing education and professional publications programs.*

Possible Implementation Steps

By schools of library and information science:
Offer mentorships, post-masters internships, and weekend or summer programs for health sciences librarians; and

Offer educational opportunities, perhaps in cooperation with professional associations or the National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NN/LM), for those

entering health sciences librarianship from other domains.

By professional organizations:

Develop self-study programs that take into account the needs of adult learning, including options for week-end study, distance learning, and home study.

Design courses for transmission across the Internet or over other telecommunication technologies supporting distance learning.

By NLM:

Fund proposals to train health sciences librarians and others through the NN/LM to use the new communications and infor-

mation technologies, including those related to High Performance Computing and Communications;

Establish mentorships for the advanced training of mid-career health sciences librarians at major libraries with established clinical, research, service, and training programs relevant to medical informatics;

Develop a summer informatics institute for practicing librarians at one of the NLM-funded medical informatics training programs; and

Develop collaborative programs for training librarians in the various information resources supporting health outcomes research and related health reform issues.

Findings

Programs enabling working professionals to obtain graduate instruction by weekend and summer study have been tried successfully at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where the weekend and distance learning program for a Masters of Public Health draws students who travel many miles to get there, and are considered some of the best students in the School of Public Health.^{45, 46}

A similar program exists at the University of Pittsburgh and, the panel thinks, possibly other universities too. So far as the Panel knows, these M.P.H. programs have not been tailored or adapted towards the needs of health sciences librarianship.

Recommendations

▼ *Universities, schools of library and information science, and professional associations should develop innovative new degree and non-degree programs for continuing education of health sciences librarians.*

▼ *NLM should offer assistance to institutions that wish to accept responsibility for creating and evaluating new educational offerings designed for adult learners in the field of health sciences librarianship.*

Possible Implementation Steps

By universities and schools of public health:

Develop expanded Masters in Public Health (M.P.H.) degree programs geared to the adult learner. These might include features such as weekend class schedules, self-directed lessons, learning at a distance, and use of the Internet for interactive learning and assessment. Such programs would provide additional training for librarians with M.L.S. degrees and multidisciplinary training for those in related fields.

Goal 3.2:
Experiment
with alternative
methods and
courses of
study for adult
learning.